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NORTH VIETNAMESE STATEMENTS ON TALKS  
AND SIGNIFICANT INTERPRETATIONS

January 28, 1967

Trinh Statement: Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy

Trinh in interview with Australian journalist

Wilfred Burchett said:

"If it [the US] really wants talks, it must first halt unconditionally the bombing raids and all other acts of war against the DRV. It is only after the unconditional cessation of US bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV that there could be talks between the DRV and the United States."

A. Importance: First time an official North Vietnamese public declaration of a willingness to talk if the bombing is stopped unconditionally.

B. Effect: Definite change in the North Vietnamese position, despite the vagueness of the "could" formula.

C. Difference:

1. In the past they had publicly insisted on the US accepting their terms for a full settlement of the war before any talks could take place.
2. Now they had suggested preliminary discussions about the terms for a settlement.

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North Vietnamese Followup:

- A. Propaganda stressed statement was an authoritative expression of policy.
  - 1. Emphasis, however, was on entire interview containing Hanoi's hard-line terms for a settlement.
  - 2. Not on the new element of flexibility regarding talks.
- B. Hanoi officially underlined significance of statement thru diplomatic channels.

Elaborations and Distortions

- A. After the original Trinh statement was made on January 28, 1967, North Vietnamese made little effort in rest of 1967 to elaborate on it.
- B. They passed up many opportunities to restate the conditional phrasing used by Trinh.
- C. A persistent problem with the Trinh formulation during 1967 was the continued use of the term "definitive" by the North Vietnamese.
  - 1. Crucial formulation about talks in Trinh's statement included only a demand for an unconditional halt to the bombing.
  - 2. Elsewhere in interview Trinh stated US must halt it "unconditionally and definitely."

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3. This same equivocation was apparent in nearly all of Hanoi's most authoritative statements on the issue, including those addressed to President Johnson and U Thant.
4. Moreover, it often appeared the North Vietnamese spokesmen wished deliberately to blur the issue.

December 29, 1967

New Trinh statement at a reception for Mongolian delegation:

A. DRV's Four Points and the Liberation Front's political program are basis for settlement of conflict.

B. He added:

"The US government has unceasingly claimed that it wants to talk with Hanoi but has received no response. If the US government truly wants to talk, it must, as was made clear in our statement of 28 January 1967, first of all stop unconditionally the bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV. After the United States has ended unconditionally the bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV, the DRV will hold talks with the United States on questions concerned."

North Vietnamese Followup

A. Initially, Hanoi took a relatively subdued approach.

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B. But now it seems to be exerting considerable effort to make its position seem as appealing as possible.

1. Diplomatic followup restricted basically to repeating and confirming the foreign minister's language.

2. And underscoring the use of the "will talk" formulation.

C. Trinh's statement on December 29 was broadcast on January 1. North Vietnamese propaganda made no followup until January 12.

1. Then it began to praise the "correct" stand expressed by Trinh.

2. Indicated widespread support for statement in foreign quarters, and condemned the "negative" US reaction.

3. North Vietnamese now emphasizing that next move is up to Washington.

January 16, 1968

Statement by DRV's representative in Paris, Mai Van Bo goes somewhat further.

A. It stresses even more strongly that Hanoi has made a significant move toward getting negotiations under way.

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- B. Bo said talks could begin "after a suitable time" following a bombing halt.
- C. He indicated that the level and content of the discussions were open to negotiation.
- D. He reiterated that the new Trinh statement was aimed at making "perfectly clear" what had been the North Vietnamese position during all of 1967.
- E. The Bo statement of January 16 was endorsed by Hanoi radio on January 18.

January 17, 1968Bo gave another interview to French columnist.

- A. He was said to be even more forthcoming in presenting Hanoi's desire for talks with the US.
- B. DRV representatives in Paris, however, say Bo's statement of 17 January only a "backgrounder" and not an authoritative public statement of Hanoi's position.
- C. Statement suggests, however, that the North Vietnamese are now going to press hard on their proposal for an end to the bombing.